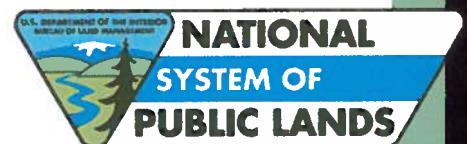


Lahontan Herd Management Area Horse Gather

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2010-0018-EA

October 2010



Background

The Lahontan Herd Management Area (HMA) is located near Silver Springs, Lyon County, Nevada. The HMA is managed by the Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) and consists of 11,029 acres, of which 583 acres are on private lands. The HMA is located almost entirely within the Lahontan Grazing Allotment which is 52,910 acres in size and is adjacent to the Lahontan State Recreation Area.

The Proposed Action is to gather and remove approximately 94 excess wild horses from within and outside the boundaries of the HMA on or about mid-November to December 2010. The gather is anticipated to take two days to complete. Excess horses are currently over-utilizing rangelands inside the HMA and have moved to areas outside the HMA boundaries. At the time of the enactment of the *Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971* (WFRHBA), the estimated horse population on the HMA was four animals. Under the WFRHBA, the Secretary of the Interior is directed to “manage wild free-roaming wild horses and burros in a manner that is designed to achieve and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands.”

A Herd Management Area Plan/Capture Plan (HMAP) was originally prepared for this HMA in 1991, and was updated in 2003. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the HMA was set after analysis of monitoring data and following a public decision-making process that resulted in a Multiple Use Decision (MUD) in 1993. The MUD established an AML range of 7 to 10 wild horses, which represents the wild horse population at which a thriving natural ecological balance can be maintained within the HMA. A direct aerial population inventory of the HMA was conducted in May, 2010. One-hundred four wild horses were observed, all were located outside of the HMA boundaries. Wild horses were observed in the portions of the Lahontan Grazing Allotment, immediately east/northeast of the HMA, and Lahontan State Recreation Area, north of the HMA. No wild horses were located inside the HMA during the aerial inventory. The current wild horse population is approximately 10 times above the upper range of AML for the HMA.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Resource Management Plan (CRMP) adopted in 2001.

The following decisions in the CRMP affect the HMA:

- **WHB-2:** decision 2 - “Maintain sound thriving populations of wild horses within HMAs.”
- **WHB-2:** decision 1 - “Develop and implement an HMAP for the HMA.”
- **WLD-2:** decision 4 - “Maintain and improve wildlife habitat, and reduce habitat conflicts while providing for other appropriate resource uses.”
- **WLD-2:** decision 6 - “Maintain or improve the condition of the public rangelands so as to enhance productivity for all rangeland values (including wildlife).”

The Proposed Action is consistent with the plans and policies of local, county, State, tribal and federal agencies and governments.

Finding

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts in the Lahontan Herd Management Area Gather Plan Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2010-0018-EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required for compliance with the National Environmental Policy of 1969 (NEPA).

This finding and conclusion is based on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the *context* and the *intensity* of impacts described in the EA.

Context:

The affected area of the Proposed Action is the adjacent Lahontan State Recreation Area, the Lahontan Herd Management Area and the Lahontan Grazing Allotment, all located in Lyon County, Nevada. The gather has been planned with input from the interested public and users of public land.

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The Proposed Action is to gather and remove approximately 94 excess wild horses living within and outside the boundaries of the HMA. This action would be consistent with the CRMP and would allow BLM to manage the public lands within the gather area for a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship consistent with other resource needs as required by the WFRHBA. Although the gather and removal of excess wild horses is expected to have short-term impacts on individual animals, over the long-term, it is expected to benefit wild horse health by improving forage and range conditions in the HMA, and would be beneficial for other rangeland resources including vegetative communities, riparian resources, and wildlife habitat.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The Standard Gather Operating Procedures (EA, Appendix A) would be used to conduct the gather and are designed to protect human health and safety, as well as the health and safety of the wild horses. The Proposed Action could have a minor effect on public health or safety during helicopter operations and around holding corrals if the public does not comply with safety protocols and BLM directions. Temporary closure of roads or other restrictions may be implemented on public lands during gather operations if deemed necessary, to allow for safe and effective operations to proceed, although such closure is not anticipated. In accordance with IM No. 2010-164 (Appendix D of the Final EA), the public will not be permitted to enter corrals or pens or be in direct contact with the animals.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

No wetlands, park lands, prime or unique farm lands, wild and scenic rivers, ecological critical areas, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern will be impacted by the Proposed Action. A cultural resource review was conducted for the holding facility and trap site. The holding facility has been previously inventoried and the trap site is within existing areas of disturbance on public lands. In the event these locations need to be relocated, cultural resource staff will facilitate the process to ensure that cultural resources are not present. The proposed gather was discussed with the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe in May of 2010; no concerns were identified. During the public comment period, letters were sent to the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, and Yerington Paiute Tribe on August 20, 2010.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the gather are well known and understood. No unresolved issues have been identified.

5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks. The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in the EA.

6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action is compatible with future consideration of actions required to improve wild horse management in conjunction with meeting objectives for wildlife habitat within the HMA. The Proposed Action does not set a precedent for future actions. Future actions would be subject to the appropriate level of NEPA analysis and decision-making processes.

7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Proposed Action has no potential to adversely affect significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The Proposed Action will have no effect on any federally listed species or their critical habitat under the ESA.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Proposed Action is in compliance with the CRMP. The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Linda J. Kelly
Field Manager
Sierra Front Field Office

10.15.10
Date